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Creating community, one amazing dish at a time

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Office of Communications & Marketing

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Photo by Caroline Massey

For immediate release

Creating community, one amazing dish at a time

By Kelsey Bester

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For more information, contact Ouachita's Office of Communications & Marketing at comm-mark@obu.edu or (870) 245-5206.

Ouachita Baptist University has been a home away from home for students from all over the world. Although Ouachita was founded in 1886, the first international student only stepped onto campus in 1923 and came all the way from China. In 2023, we have reached 100 celebratory years since Ouachita's first international student arrived, and our campus continues to value the attendance and presence of international students.

More than 100 countries have been represented at Ouachita by our international students. Through this common ground, a strong international community has been fostered among them. International students find strength and safety in knowing that there are others around them who are also far from home; they have one another as support, and they care for each other.

This community has only grown over the years, and these students now express themselves and their culture by creating and hosting a booming annual event known as the International Food Festival. This festival brings in more than 500 attendees each year and fosters a spirit of appreciation for diversity and the celebration of these students on our campus.

Each detail planned and step executed is carefully thought out by the leadership team that plans this event. A leadership group of approximately 13 international students and third culture kids begins preparing about three months before the event occurs. Subgroups are established in which certain members are responsible for organizing volunteers, catering, sponsor development, marketing and décor.

Weekly meetings and hours of creative thinking and implementation are poured into this event. Many hours have gone into planning the 2023 International Food Festival as this is dedicated to celebrating a century since the first international student enrolled at Ouachita. The international students cannot wait to share this experience with Ouachita on Tuesday, Feb. 21.

International students, third culture kids, professors and faculty who have lived overseas are encouraged to cook or bake a dish that originates from their countries. Not only does this event promote a fun environment for American students to try cuisines handmade by people from all over the world, it also provides international students with the opportunity to share their culture and a piece of their home with friends in the United States. Sharing their food and their culture with others creates immense joy in our international students, as they love how the taste of home fosters curiosity and understanding in their American friends.

The International Food Festival shows a small glimpse into the lives of our foreign students. Attending events like this as a campus only grows us in community with one another.



Kelsey Bester is a senior biology and communications & media/strategic communications double major from Johannesburg, South Africa.